



No. CXL.

SATURDAY, DECEMBER 27, 1845.

ADDRESS.



WITH the present number we close our volume for 1845. During the year that has passed since we issued our last address, we have striven earnestly to redeem the promises therein made, and to render *THE BUILDER* worthy of the encouragement and support kindly awarded to it by the public. In proof of this we are able, with respectful confidence, to appeal to the work itself, and venture to aver that it contains a body of information of the greatest value to a large and varied class. The public, we say it with pride and gratitude, have acknowledged our endeavours in the most substantial manner, and *THE BUILDER* is now the universally recognized organ of those who are engaged or interested in the arts of construction or design.

Self-gratulation is never becoming. If there be a time, however, when it appears less objectionable than usual, it is, perhaps, when justifying former professions, with the view of obviating entire belief in those you are about to make; and we may therefore hope to be excused at this, the termination of the year, for the previous expression, and a further brief reference to what has been done during that time.

The volume contains 630 pages of letter-press, exclusive of advertisements and Supplements, and has 280 illustrations,—many of them of great excellence. Apart from the picturesque views, it will be found to contain, when looked at as a whole, a large number of Gothic details, practically useful, in the shape of decorated and perpendicular windows, doors, fonts and font covers, of various periods, bench-ends, &c., as well as many valuable examples of Elizabethan architecture and fittings.

"Improvement" has been our key note,—the improvement of the metropolis, the improvement of buildings in a sanitary and constructional point of view, the improvement of our operatives, improvements in ventilation, and improved form of sewers have been constantly urged by us with sincere zeal, resulting from a sense of their paramount importance.

Touching the Metropolitan Buildings Act and its administration,—our pages contain a large body of information not to be obtained elsewhere; in fact, it is not too much to affirm, that the volume, if on this account alone, will be found of essential value by all who are interested in house-property, within the limits of the act. With a view to that circumstance, amongst others, a comprehensive index has been prepared, and, together with the title-page, &c., to bind up in the volume, will be presented gratuitously with the first number for the new year.*

The new year! how numerous are the emotions to which this sentence gives rise, how important are the duties that it reminds us of. Is it beyond our province to urge our young readers, briefly and in passing, not to disregard

its promptings, but to endeavour by industry and application, to supply the omissions of the past?

With the new year we shall again come before the public, with the determination to improve to the utmost the character of the journal, and to merit a further increase of public favour, and a numerous accession of readers: to our present friends and assistants we look with confidence for a continuation of their kind and valued support.

THE ARCHITECTURE OF FLORENCE.*

In previous papers, illustrative of Italian architecture, we have endeavoured to indicate the materials for general history, to be deduced from the monuments of art. Had the pages of this journal been less devoted to matters purely professional, and momentary, than necessarily they are, we might have further excited the attention of our readers in a ground little trodden, and pregnant with interest. Let it suffice here to say, that to whatever phase of art we look, we need no lens to discover the impress of the age, which originated the work, the political and social state of the people. We have noticed the long dearth of art in Italy, previous to the influx of the Gothic style, as coexistent with internal commotion, and the decay of letters. We have examined the position of the art under the atmosphere of commercial prosperity in Venice, and Genoa; brilliant in spite of dissensions, internal as well as external; and, with the work before us, we now propose to speak of the peculiar influence upon, and character of, the architecture of Florence.

Not less distinguished for commercial greatness, than the other republics of Italy, Florence attained a remarkable eminence in art. Having acquired considerable wealth by attention to manufactures, its commerce was extended to all parts of Europe; and subsequently, the possession of a sea-port enabled the Florentines to compete with the Genoese and the Venetians, on the Mediterranean. Engaged in banking, the money trade of nearly all the kingdoms of Europe fell into their hands; and in several states, they were intrusted with the collecting and administration of the public revenues. But, that remarkable state of civil discord, into which all the cities of Italy fell, was nowhere more perceptible than in Florence. The rival parties of the Guelphs and the Ghibellines, and later, of the Neri and the Bianchi, kept the city in ceaseless commotion from an early period of its history to the time of the Medici. It was this very state of circumstances, which produced the peculiar style of Florentine architecture.

The influence of the Gothic style was felt in Florence until a late period. Though, in that city, probably the first advances towards the decay of Gothic architecture were made, many of the old forms lingered in the principal façades even to the middle of the fifteenth century. In 1298, Arnolfo di Lapo, according to Vasari, but according to Nolli, Arnolfo di Cambio da Colle, laid the foundations of the Cathedral of Sta. Maria del Fiore. This commencement was previous to what is generally understood by the "revival;" yet the building seems to have been conceived in an original style of architecture. Orgagna and others further advanced the cathedral, and greatly contributed to the alteration of style. But in 1407, the city called a meeting of architects to discuss the best mode of completing the cathedral, and Brunelleschi boldly offered to raise the dome. This architect at length succeeded in producing the earliest, and perhaps the most wonderful, cupola of the world. The influence, which Brunelleschi thus acquired, enabled him to work that change in the style of Italy, which he had learned to contemplate, whilst engaged in the examination of architectural works in Rome. His abilities were exercised in other cities of Italy, and he was employed by Duke Filippo Maria on the fortifications of Milan. He left a school of architects imbued with the principles on which he worked, who rapidly spread the change. Almost at the same time,

the dukes of Milan, and the princes of Italy were actuated by love of art; Alberti produced his famous treatise, and further carried out the native style; and Roman forms and principles were everywhere dominant.

The most striking characteristics of Florentine architecture are massiveness and severity. Large blocks of stone were easily procured in the quarries of Tuscany, and solidity and strength were in some measure demanded in a residence, which had often to answer the purpose of a castle. In the refinement of details, the Florentine school is inferior to those of Venice and Rome, but for bold, imposing masses, no city is equal to Florence. The walls are, almost universally, rusticated the entire height, and in some cases with pleasing variety in the treatment. The apertures in the ground floor are at some distance from the ground, and are square, and small in size. The cornices are frequently on a grand scale, and are, in the earlier buildings, provided with the means of defence. The line of front is generally unbroken, and the piasas do not display the same ingenuity, as those at Venice and Genoa.—The buildings of Florence, says the work before us, appear to be not the work of ordinary men; we enter them with respect, believing to find them inhabited by beings of a nature superior to ours. Whether the eye is arrested by monuments of the age of Cosmo de Medici, or of times which preceded or followed it, all in this imposing city carries the imprint of grandeur and majesty. Frequent revolutions obliged the chiefs of parties to consider their personal safety, along with the magnificence of their dwellings. Externally, they are examples of the skillful union of grace with simplicity and massiveness, internally, models of exquisite taste. After Rome, Florence is the most interesting city to every artist.—The courts are often elegant, with fountains and gardens. The cornice is sometimes of little height, but great projection, with two modillions, ranged one over the other in a curious manner.—The Pitti palace has a balustrade, formed of small Ionic columns, supposed to be the earliest instance of that member. The rusticated archivolts are generally of small stones, the intrados semicircular, but the estrados a pointed arch. Up to the middle of the fifteenth century, the window with a central culoma, each light having a semicircular arch, the whole being covered by a semicircular head, was universal. Iron-work was much employed, and many of the buildings had lanterns at the angles, and rings suspended at intervals. About the middle of the fifteenth century flourished one Nicolo Grosso Caparra, an excellent worker in metal, and the cresets—"lumiére maravigliose,"—are beautiful specimens of his work. It is said, though the evidence is not clear, that the right of affixing such cresets was a peculiar honour, granted to the families, who had distinguished themselves by the gown or the sword, and that those of less consideration were only allowed to illuminate the battlements of their towers.

One of the earliest buildings of Florence is the Palazzo del Podesta. It is generally understood to have been built by Arnolfo di Lapo, but much resembles the style of Orgagna. It has a very decided Gothic character, and has the date 1250. The Palazzo Vecchio, erected by Arnolfo in 1298, had enormous battlements, and projecting machicolations. The building was greatly altered by Vasari, under Cosmo de Medici; and at that period gained the appearance represented in the work. The court is lavishly embellished with painting and sculpture, much of it of a later date. The "Piazza del Gran' Duca" contains many remarkable works of art. Passing by the statue of Cosmo the Great, a curious structure is the Loggia de' Lanzi. It is an excellent example of the transition from Gothic architecture; with much of the earlier style about the cornice and ornaments, it has semicircular arches rising from shafts composed of clustered pilasters. It was built in the year 1356: Orgagna was the architect. Omitting many churches of early date, which are very slightly noticed in the book before us, we come to the Palazzo Riccardi. This building was commenced in 1430, under Michelozzi: it is a noble specimen of the style. It is in three stories, each rusticated, and is surmounted by a massive cornice. The ground story is lofty, and has five large arches and

* Copies for binding *THE BUILDER* may be obtained at the office as usual, upon two shillings; or the publisher will undertake to bind sets of three shillings per volume.

* *Architecture Toscane, ou, Palais, Monumens, et autres edifices de la Toscane, mesure et dessinés par A. Grandjean de Montigny et A. Fazio, architectes, anciens Penionnaires de l'Académie de France, à Rome. Paris, 1837.*

* *De Re. Edificatoria.*
* Murray's Handbook to Northern Italy.